

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION**

Please amend paragraph number [00111] as follows:

[00111] One embodiment is a water-soluble, hydrophilic polymer is provided that is free of covalent crosslinks, wherein the polymer is prepared by polymerization of a composition consisting essentially of a hydrophilic monomer, and an acrylic acid monomer esterified with a hydrophilic side chain, preferably a poly(alkylene oxide) chain containing about 4-40 alkylene oxide units. Preferred alkylene oxide units include ethylene oxide, propylene oxide, and combinations thereof. Particularly ~~referred~~ preferred esterified acrylic acid monomers include polyethylene glycol monoacrylate and polyethylene glycol monomethacrylate. Suitable hydrophilic monomers are as set forth above.